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## New economic development group may be best served by thinking small

Meetings to determine the state of the labour market in Medicine Hat and how best to target economic development efforts got underway on Wednesday night.

One can only hope it goes beyond the 10-year brainstorming session that has led us here.

That's not to say that big picture thinking isn't required, and even necessary. But what's clearly needed in Medicine Hat is well-defined, well-thought-out, attainable goals as part of a larger strategy.

We're starting in a good place.

Aurora Cannabis, hemp-oil manufacturing, Hut 8, an expansion at Cancarb, a commercial building boom and a host of other projects bolster arguments that business conditions here are better that they have been in 10 years.

As depressing as it is to see vacant oilfield shops, the activity is certainly more broad than when natural gas was rockin' and rollin' along in the mid-2000s.

In fact, the local economic and hiring outlook (900 new jobs in the next year) is the entire reason behind the new study.

Yet deep concern remains about the ground level economy, the plight of former oilpatch workers and the prospects for Medicine Hat and the region.

It's been a familiar refrain that small business operators are taxed too highly, too highly regulated and in need of relief. Their lobbying leads to "business retention" as an added mandate for municipal economic developers.

That will certainly be the basis of some comments gathered at sessions held Wednesday and Thursday this week.

The Business Retention and Expansion Workforce Development (BREWD) strategy is being led by the City of Medicine Hat's business support office. It includes a host of partners, including Verge Economic Development (the group contracted by surrounding towns and counties) as well as some businesses and Medicine Hat College.

We will await the results of their work, due later this year in a report, but a scattergun approach that recycles talking points about traditional strengths and long-proposed, go-nowhere projects simply won't cut it.

Organizers are certainly capable, but it's a task to separate fact from dearly held fiction and realize what's politically expedient to say and do are two different things.

Around Medicine Hat, oilpatch activity for shallow gas will continue to remain low, and while natural gas is plentiful and cheap here (seemingly a draw for industry), it's not more so than anywhere else in Alberta.

Also, the population here and across Canada is aging, leading to substantial changes in the labour and housing markets. It makes go-to arguments about the need population growth unattainable for the most part.

And, it's not polite to say but it's hard not to admit that Medicine Hat's workforce is not particularly well-skilled to suit a fast-evolving economy. A laudable and key goal of the current effort is correcting this.

To solve a host of ills, past efforts relied on a number of big ticket cure-all lurking in the background over the recent past. The twinning of Highway 3 or setting up a rail container port are good ideas perhaps, but the province and CP Rail clearly have other priorities. Similarly, moving the downtown railyard is as feasible as building the Meridian Dam, which will almost certainly be suggested again. Let's also put the Wild Horse Border Crossing on the shelf for a while.

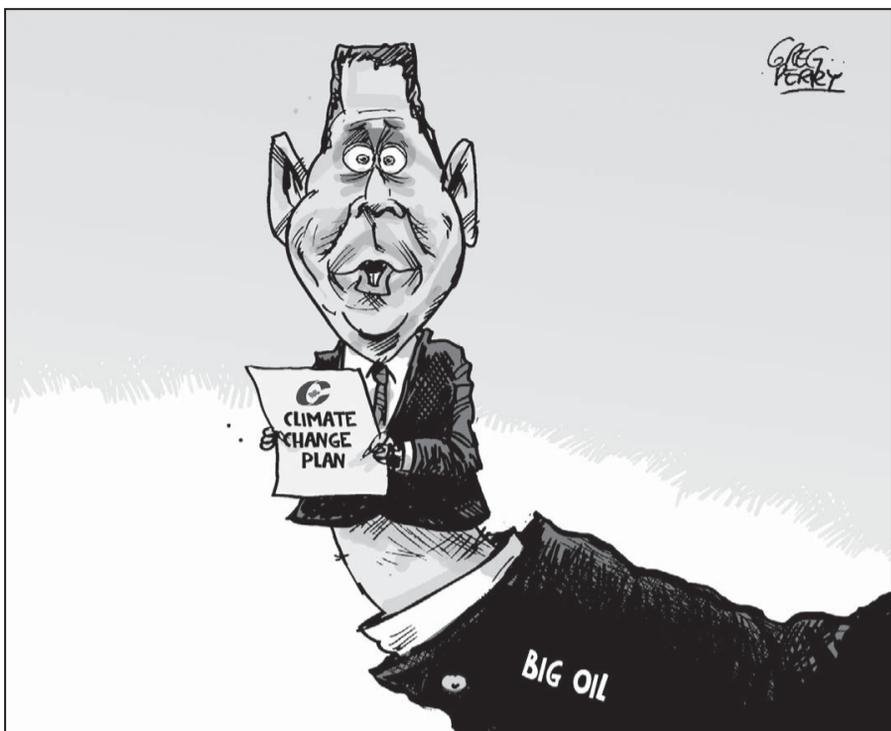
Help for small business owners is more attainable, but can be politically dicey in practice, pitting new and existing businesses against each other, or both against the rest of the general tax base.

The new provincial government appears eager to act on every suggestion of numerous business lobby groups. It leaves some question about what more local governments could do or how to make local economy's stand out to potential investors.

It's a tall order for the ongoing BREWD initiative, one that may be best delivered in bite-sized chunks.

(Collin Gallant is a News reporter. To comment on this and other editorials, go to [www.medicinehatnews.com/opinions/](http://www.medicinehatnews.com/opinions/).)

"... were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." — Thomas Jefferson.



**Collin Gallant**  
Comment

### Tickled Pink

To read the Bruno Gerussi story and learn of his time in Medicine Hat. His CBC morning show on the radio was wonderful time turning the morning into a kaleidoscope of music and interviews and let the way for others including Peter Gzowski.

### Tickled Off

I live in a school/playground zone, maybe 10% of drivers actually obey the limit, and the city thinks a couple signs and markings will change anything.

### Tickled Off

By dog owners who walk their dogs in alleys and feel there isn't a need to pick up after their dogs. Where are your poop bags?

### Tickled Pink

I'm so thankful our local school district will have an EA watch my kindergarten child full time for \$250 a month.

### Tickled Off

That our local school district continues to overwork and under-appreciate teachers.

### Tickled Off

Now my taxpayer money goes to refunds and do-overs because the Canalta Centre people can't do simple math on wing consumption.

### Tickled Off

The city announced a cut back on care of some public parks. If they do this the weeds will get higher and thicker than they are now.

### Tickled Pink

That Canada no longer allows whales, dolphins or porpoises to be kept in captivity. I hope primates and elephants are next on the list.

### Tickled Off

Unions and drug testing should be a necessity in all healthcare settings. Secondly their should be equal genders in management too many of one sex is cause for trouble.

### Tickled Off

When our economy was tanking and our debt increasing the NDP never once thought we

should control public spending. Now the UCP has to get tough to put us back on the right track.

### Tickled Off

At the UCP government for overriding legitimate contract agreements. They want to cut wages for many hard-working people. Maybe they should lead by example and cut their own very lucrative wages and golden pensions.

### Tickled Off

At schools and their staff members who play mind games with parents on when school actually ends for this year and when there are students day off.

### Tickled Off

Recent news indicates that the carbon tax will eventually cost the average vehicle driver at least \$10 more for a fill up than it costs now.

### Tickled Pink

To the lady and her daughter walking their dog near Southridge Drive two weeks ago who, when asked by my U.S. visitor for directions, took the time to get their car and had my visitor follow them right to my residence.

### Tickled Pink

I apologize to the owner of the parking spot I took downtown at the apartment building. I was scared there would be hail and my classic Mustang would be dented. You left a nice note and I hope you were able to find another spot.

### Tickled Pink

Oct. 21 can't come soon enough for Alberta and the rest of our great country.

### Tickled Off

As a resident and taxpayer I am embarrassed by the upkeep of the grounds at the cemetery.

### Tickled Off

Why is gas in Medicine Hat 20 cents a litre more than Calgary? Been 97.9 in Calgary for more than a week.

### Tickled Off

There are people going to the food bank who can afford to buy their own groceries.

## Ticked Off & Tickled Pink

### SPEAK YOUR MIND

Phone: 403-528-5682

Email:

ticked@medicinehatnews.com

Ticked Off and Tickled Pink provides a venue for the free exchange of ideas in our community. While we encourage comments on every topic, the News reserves the right to edit them for length, timeliness, libel and decency. No identifying factors can be present in the submissions.

### Tickled Off

I just love sitting on my deck and smelling skunk. I wonder if the prime minister has to smell skunk when he sits out on his deck? Marijuana stinks

### Tickled Pink

To know what part of "stop burning fossil fuels" our PM doesn't understand.

### Tickled Off

\$50,000 for dogs while cutting back on trail upkeep ad repairs. Are dogs now more important than people?

### Tickled Off

Dogs bark, it's what they do. Quit being such whiny babies and mind your business.

### Tickled Off

The greenery along Scholten Hill is not being watered and a school on my street doesn't water the grass or cut it all summer.

### Tickled Off

Why isn't the bylaw about people returning carts to their own property after collection enforced?

### Tickled Pink

If during a cleanup of ditches close to Brier Park a couple of boxes containing precious items were found, possibly months ago. You can email [ticked@medicinehatnews.com](mailto:ticked@medicinehatnews.com) to get my contact info.



### WRITE/EMAIL US

The Medicine Hat News welcomes your letters. Letters must be signed, include your full name, address and daytime telephone number for verification. Please try to keep letters to fewer than 300 words. Letters are subject to editing. Address letters c/o Letter to the Editor, 3257 Dunmore Road, S.E. Medicine Hat Alta., T1B 3R2 or drop them off at 3257 Dunmore Road, S.E. Phone: 403-527-1101, fax: 403-528-5696 or email: [letters@medicinehatnews.com](mailto:letters@medicinehatnews.com)



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